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Contact-Induced Change? Basque lisp in Navarre

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a first approach in analysing the contact between the Basque and Spanish languages as the source of the Basque lisp in Navarre. A preliminary study of the geographical and social distribution of lisp in Navarre has been conducted based on recordings from the database of the Archive of Immaterial Heritage of Navarre. We find that the presence of the lisp is mainly located in areas where contact is more intense, which may indicate that contact is essential for change.

Keywords: *language contact, language change, Basque lisp, sibilants and linguistic zone*

Mots-clés: *contact des langues, changements linguistiques, “seseo” Basque, sibilants et la zone linguistique*

INTRODUCTION: “CONTACT” AS LINGUISTIC CHANGE

In recent decades, the field that studies the effects of contact between language varieties has experienced increased attention as well as great development, and includes different perspectives in a multitude of contexts.¹ In general, we define 'language contact' as a situation where two or more varieties are used either by individual speakers or by either parts or the whole of a community within a specific area and over time. However, in recent years, the question of the scope of 'language contact' is a major concern for many researchers, as is the definition of multiperspective study methods that can provide comprehensive analyses of contact phenomena in all of their dimensions. At this point it is necessary to theorize about the boundaries of the object of study in order to restrict its description (Nicolai, 2014).

Currently, the postulate that all language varieties have been more or less influenced by other varieties is completely accepted by the scientific community. Nonetheless, the nature and intensity of such influences are not as clearly defined. When referring to the literature, we find authors who support the potential of linguistic transfer being possible among all language levels, as long as the contact is prolonged or intense enough (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988; Thomason, 2001, Heine and Kuteva, 2008); whereas other authors establish the limits of contact to the syntactic level, where the language is hardly affected (Romaine, 1988; Poplack and Levy, 2010, Silva-Corvalán, 2008). Thus, there is a clear need for continued work in order to be able to answer questions of this nature and to better define the object of study.

Authors do agree, however, on the existence of three dimensions where language contact takes place: firstly, a linguistic or structural dimension, on a purely linguistic level; secondly, a psycholinguistic dimension, embodied by the individual, where contact occurs between varieties in use; and finally, a social dimension where the transfer becomes part of the community and is affected by extralinguistic factors that will determine the success or failure of the transfer. Thus, it is not only the linguistic affinity between varieties that is presented as essential to the outcome of change, but also the intensity of the contact (for a given time in a specific space), as well as demographic and cultural factors (Weinreich, 1953; Thomason, 2001; Tabouret-Keller, 2014 and Nicolai, 2014 among others).

The speaker's attitude is a key factor for change as well; speakers identify with certain social groups or ethnic bases through linguistic features based on their skills (Nortier and Doortijn, 2008). Not so long ago, it was generally considered that the most prestigious language had greater influence on the less prestigious, and thus it was in the latter where the greatest changes would take place. Today, however, authors who have measured the social dominance or pressure from one language on another in relation to their status (Johanson, 2002, among others) have not been able to find a clear correlation of this sociolinguistic parameter and the presence or absence of transfer.

Finally, we should highlight the need to combine both diachronic and synchronic perspectives when contemplating contact-induced change, especially for situations where contact has been more

¹ In this paper we follow the terminology proposed by Ferguson (1959). *Language variety* refers both to what is known as the dialects of a language or what is known as linguistic patterns considered *languages*.

prolonged and intense, since the interpenetration of features tends to be deeper in this kind of situations than in immediate contact environments (Sewell and Salmons, 2014).

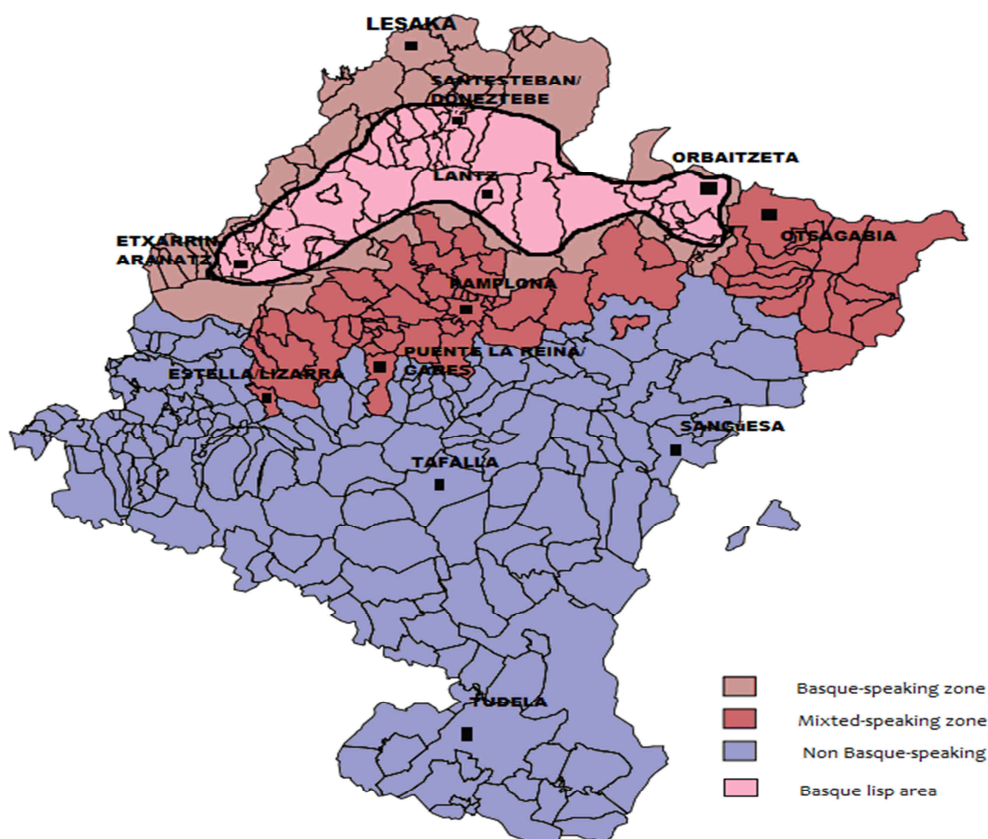
This leads us to our current research that is being carried out in Navarre, a region situated within the northern part of the Iberian Peninsula. We argue that contact between Basque and Spanish is the main cause of the presence of Basque lisp especially among speakers whose first language is Basque and who display this feature in their Spanish variety; and speakers whose first language is Spanish and who live in an area of intense contact. We do ask, however, to what extent the contact is necessary? Since there are other varieties of Spanish that have the lisp even without being in contact with Basque, we might consider it to be the result of contact or an internal change of language. We also ask whether the identification of this linguistic feature with a particular social group enhances the transfer or not, and to which degree? Our ongoing research aims to answer these questions. To this end, we performed a preliminary analysis of the distribution of lisp within the Navarre community. The results are presented in this paper.

1. CONTACT BETWEEN BASQUE AND SPANISH

In the Navarre area contact between varieties goes back to ancient times. As is indicated by Cenoz and Perales (2001), the sociolinguistic relationship between the two varieties has been considered as diglossic. Basque has traditionally been relegated to informal situations, while Spanish has been regarded as a language of culture and reserved for formal situations, until very recent times. Most recent data show intense contact between Basque and Spanish in the Basque-speaking zone, and to a lesser extent in the mixed-speaking zone of Navarre. According to the Regional Law 18/1986 of December 15 of Basque, Navarre is divided into three language areas: Basque-speaking, mixed-speaking and non Basque-speaking area (see figure 1).

The current situation can be defined as social bilingualism on diglossic basis, where diglossia is understood as the use of two varieties reserved for different functions, even in those cases where the use of each variety depends on circumstances established by the linguistic regulation itself (Etxebarria, 2000; Oroz, 2008). According to sociolinguistic studies in this regard, the influence of Basque on Spanish also existed, although to a lesser extent than the influence of Spanish on Basque (Etxebarria, 2000; Aragüés, 2003; Taberner, 2008, among others). On the phonetic level, the replacement of the Spanish [θ] by other sibilants present in Basque, known as the Basque lisp, has been attributed to the abovementioned influence (Hualde, 2010; Isasi, Iribar and Del Moral, 2009).

Figure 1: Area where Basque lisp has been detected.²



2. BASQUE LISP

The Basque lisp has received little attention until recent times. Research on the topic has mainly focused on areas of the Basque Country, leaving out the linguistic area of Navarre. This current study is part of a larger project on the lisp in Navarre, and its first part concentrates on the analysis of linguistic data from *the Archives of Immaterial Heritage of Navarre*.³

The relevance of contact-induced change between Basque and Spanish in the lisp's development has resulted in disparate positions. Some consider the lisp as a classification criteria rather than the cause of the phenomenon (Ramírez Luengo, Iribar and Isasi Martínez, 2010), while other, more recent studies point out language contact as an essential cause of its expansion (Isasi, Iribar and Túrrez, 2013; Romero, 2014). So far, studies on lisp have focused mainly on Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, areas within the Basque Country (Isasi, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2006), and within a diachronic framework. Only in recent, more experimental research linguists have studied present-day speakers from a phonetic perspective (Iribar, Isasi, Gomez and Moral, 2005; Iribar and Isasi, 2008; Isasi,

² On figure 1 we can distinguish by different colours the three linguistic zones and all of the locations which belong to each zone according to the Regional Law 18/1986 of December 15 of Basque. Likewise, we can appreciate the influence area of lisp detected in this study. The map was created by myself for the representation of lisp productions in Navarre.

³ It is a research project coordinated by the Department of Philology and Language Teaching at the Public University of Navarre, and it consists of the realization of a multimedia, audio, visual and textual database of the oral and immaterial heritage of Navarre and Lower Navarre.

Iribar and Túrrez, 2013). The lack of research on the phenomenon in the Navarre area makes it necessary to approach it from several perspectives.

As previously indicated, the lisp can be defined broadly as the replacement of Spanish [θ] by another sound from the Basque sibilant system (for more thorough definitions of the phenomenon see: Isasi, Iribar and Túrrez, 2013; Hualde, 2010). Thus, all the recent definitions of the phenomenon place it in a context of contact with Basque, pointing out this contact as the main cause for the change. So far, the studies conducted have focused on speakers whose L1 is Basque and who show this feature in their L2 (Spanish). We want to not only document the existence of this feature in Navarre,⁴ but also document L1 Spanish speakers presenting lisp who don't speak Basque as L2 or who have had minimal contact with Basque speakers, in order to investigate whether the Basque lisp has already become a feature of the Spanish variety spoken within the contact areas or not. We also examine the social and psychological factors that underlie this phenomenon.

Below, we present a preliminary study on the Basque lisp carried out in Navarre. The aim of this study is two-fold: firstly, we will trace the presence of lisp speakers in Navarre and offer an initial distribution of the phenomenon within the community; and secondly, we will verify the presence of lisp speakers according to contact area and individuals' linguistic profiles.

3. APPROACH

3.1. Methodology

For the present study we have taken oral documents from the *Archives of Inmaterial Heritage of Navarre*.⁵ Although we do not have data for all the municipalities in Navarre, the documents gathered thus far are numerous enough to allow an empirical approach to lisp using real data.

Three criteria were taken into account in the selection of locations for the sample: *linguistic zone*,⁶ the *dialect area* they belong to and *population density*. For the latter criterion we distinguished between different sizes of population cores in order to obtain a sample that would be as representative as possible.⁷ In total, 16 locations in the Basque-speaking zone and 12 in the mixed-speaking were preselected; however, due to the lack of testimonies in Spanish in the *Archive's* databases, the locations were reduced to 12 and 8, respectively.

Within these populations, we encountered some problems during the informant selection process, especially because of three factors: the scarce presence of Spanish records from the selected locations within the Basque-speaking area in the *Archive's* database; the heterogeneity of the sources that we have worked on; and a lack of a linguistic profiles for the selected informants whose first

⁴ There are references to this feature in areas bordering to the Basque Country in previous studies (see Isasi, Iribar and Túrrez 2013).

⁵ These data are mainly composed of interviews about ethnographic aspects of the area. All of them are properly digitized and classified, and corresponded primarily and in greater numbers to interviews collected by the main researchers behind the project, and secondly, to contributions made by *Labrit Patrimonio*, *EuskoKultur Fundazioa* and *Euskomedia*, among others.

⁶ The linguistic zones included in the study correspond to the Basque-speaking and Mixed-speaking zones.

⁷ The initial aim of this criterion was to observe whether there is a contrast between urban and rural settings, however, we found that 78% are rural compared to just 18% recognized as intermediate and scarce 4% of urban locations, besides all the urban locations are concentrated in the mixed-speaking zone.

languages were often not specified. Also, due to the mainly ethnographic character of the *Archive*, the age range is concentrated between 65-85 years. Thus, the sample is formed by a specific portion of the main population, predominantly from rural spheres with low educational level, and whose language variety is not representative of current changes occurring in the area. This is true especially in the mixed-speaking zone, where, in many cases, informants belong to a generation for which the Basque language was banned or lost, even if it is being recovered nowadays. Yet, we believe this is a valuable step in the observation of lisp distribution. It will allow us to observe population nuclei for further work on the phenomenon, especially from a sociolinguistic point of view, as well as laying the foundations for the analysis of the evolution (origin, survival or loss) of lisp in the area.

3.2. *Data analysis*

Altogether, 44 informants participated in the study (28 from the Basque-speaking zone and 16 from the mixed-speaking zone). We viewed their interviews and noted all the productions considered as 'lispings'.⁸ We also provided sociolinguistics data sheets for every informant and everyone was classified as either a 'lisper' (regular or sporadic) or a 'no lisper',⁹ in line with previous studies (Isasi, Iribar and Túrrez 2013). Results show, a fairly homogeneous distribution of the phenomenon according to the linguistic area the informant belongs to; all the lispings informants were detected in the Basque-speaking zone while none were found in the mixed-speaking zone. Within the Basque-speaking zone, in almost every location included in the study, cases of lisp were detected for each of the three linguistic profiles (L1 Spanish, L1 Spanish-L2 Basque and L1 Basque-L2 Spanish). These findings allow us to create a preliminary lispings area with the data. Within the southern part of the lispings area (see figure 1) we find a concentrated presence of speakers with regular lispings, with a few exceptions. Based on these outcomes, we see that the area with the highest number of more lispings informants borders neatly with the line separating the linguistic areas (Basque-speaking and mixed-speaking areas), which could let us infer that contact with Basque is a decisive factor in the presence of the phenomenon.

A possible explanation of the use of lisp among L1 Spanish speakers in the Navarre area, especially among speakers of this age group (65-85 years old) from the Basque-speaking zone and to a lesser extent in the mixed-speaking zone (specifically from the north-east of Navarre; Otsagabia, Güesa and Itzaltzu), is the fact that during Franco's repression the use of Basque language was forbidden in these zones. Some informants claim that their parents' mother tongue was Basque, but that due to circumstances imposed by the dictatorship, they didn't teach it to their children. Others mentioned that they used to "speak mostly in Basque" until they started school and were forced to stop using it. It would be interesting to observe if lisp has become a stable feature of the Spanish

⁸ In this first approach to distribution of 'lisp', does not take into account the type of lispings presented, i.e. the phonetic characteristics of sibilants used by each of the speakers in relation to the variety of Basque in the area. For now, we understand by 'lisp' any substitution of Spanish [θ] for any other sibilant.

⁹ Informants have been classified according to the frequency of lispings cases uses. Although there has been no speaker in which all productions of [θ] were replaced, we considered production of "regular lisp" greater than 70% of embodiments frequency and "sporadic" if embodiments are presented from 20%-70%. Those speakers who had no replacement, or only at loans or Basque names were considered non lispers.

variety from the Basque-speaking zone, i.e. if other groups, regardless of age and with different language profiles, also use it.

When organizing the social data from informants of the Basque-speaking zone with a concentration lisper speakers (see table 1 below) by gender, we observe that the proportion of lisper men (both regular and sporadic) is greater than that of women, 92% as compared to 40%, respectively. If the lisp can be interpreted as a feature preferred by male speakers, it would give useful insight into the sociolinguistic factors that are part of this marked difference. Our data do not allow us go into deeper interpretations on gender language differences. Yet, we observe that Labov’s first principle about language change induced by gender, which states that “in stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women” (Labov, 1990), is fulfilled. However, due to the characteristics of our sample, an affirmation like this is to criticism and questions regarding whether we are in fact dealing with a “stable sociolinguistic stratification” and on how other social factors are related to gender in this situation, among other concerns that have not been addressed in this study.

As for the variables of age and educational level, the results do not provide substantial variation due to the homogeneity of the sample. Again, it would be necessary to compare the results obtained in this study with other population groups that differ in age and with a wider range in relation to level of education, for the purpose of establishing whether we are dealing with a residual phenomenon or not (Isasi, Iribar and Túrrez, 2013).

In terms of age, we are faced with a wide span (over 40 years, from 55-99) in the elder population sector, which reduces the representativeness of the results, although it still offers good indications as to the extent of this linguistic feature. Even so, documenting the lisp presence among these speakers is of vital importance for the future of the project as it will serve as a reference for finding new samples from younger informants. Subsequently, when comparing the groups, we will be able to trace the evolution of the phenomenon in local speech.

Table 1 : Proportion of lispers and non-lispers according to L1 and gender.

		Non lispers		Lispers			
				Regular		Sporadic	
Basque-speaking		%	number	%	number	%	number
L1 Spanish	Men	20%	2	50%	5	30%	3
	Women	66.7%	6	11.1%	1	22.2%	2
L1 Basque	Men	-	-	50%	1	50%	1
	Women	-	-	100%	1	-	-
L1 S.-L2 B.	Men	-	-	50%	1	50%	1
	Women	60%	3	20%	1	20%	1
Mixed-speaking							
L1 Spanish	Men	100%	8				
	Women	100%	8				

CONCLUSIONS

In this first approach in analysing the Basque lisp in Navarre, we have shown that the phenomenon is indeed present in this area, as well as in other areas where Spanish is in contact with

Basque. This suggests that contact between the two varieties is essential for the existence of the phenomenon. Through analysis of the data collected from the *Archive of Immaterial Heritage* we've seen that presence of the lisp is mainly located in locations within the Basque-speaking area, especially in its southern slope. Nevertheless, certain regions of this area have not received the enough scrutiny due to lack of data. Thus, there is a need for the collection of new data to cover all the linguistic areas more representatively and to verify whether all population groups share the feature when speaking in Spanish.

As we have already noted, the homogeneity of the sample in terms of age, education level and occupation has been a limitation when wanting to investigate the degree of lisp vitality in populations with different social profiles. A more complete sociolinguistic study, composed of a representative list of informants and where the extracted results will illustrate the contemporaneity of detected features, is necessary. Such a study would allow us to expand the sociolinguistic dimension of the phenomenon and establish to what extent social factors (population, age, gender, education and occupation) are involved in the use of the variable.

In this first paper, only a preliminary distribution of Basque lisp presence in Navarre has been offered. Henceforth, several aspects should to be investigated; such as the relationship between the types of sibilants productions made by speakers and their relationship to the sibilants system from the Basque of each area. In the future we would like to explore the issue of contact between the two varieties and the possible transfer of features between them. It would also be of great interest to investigate what language attitudes Basque lisp evoke among its speakers, as well as its role as a mark of identification within a particular social group or how it is perceived in those neighbouring communities whose varieties do not use the feature, in order to deepen the sociolinguistic dimension of the phenomenon.

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